No. 5

A LETTER

TO THE

HOUSE OF PEERS,

ON THE

PRESENT BILL

DEPENDING IN PARLIAMENT,

RELATIVE TO THE

Prince of Wales's Debts.

BY A HANOVERIAN.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR LEE, HAY-MARKET; JORDAN, FLEET-STREET; AND PARSONS, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1795.

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[*PRICE ONE SHILLING.*]

A

LETTER

TO THE

HOUSE OF PEERS,

ON THE

PRESENT BILL,

DEPENDING IN PARLIAMENT,

BRITISH MUSEUM

RELATIVE

to the Queen's Trial.

BY A MANCHESTERIAN.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. ALMON, OPPOSITE BURLINGTON HOUSE, PICCADILLY; AND J. DEBRETT, OPPOSITE BOLTON ROW.

1795.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

A LETTER, &c.

THE political opinions which have lately been promulgated, and the present situation of public affairs have filled the minds of many with serious and well-grounded apprehensions; and there are none of his Majesty's subjects who have so much reason to be alarmed as your Lordships. Hereditary honours, hereditary power, and entailed possessions have been chiefly attacked by the new Theorists, and it must be owned that those are the parts of the British Constitution which are most difficult to be defended. The conclusions drawn from all speculations on the Rights of Man are hostile to your privileges, and the only way in which the propriety of continuing them can be maintained, is by setting forth the practical advantages which we have experienced from your order, and the mischiefs which would probably arise from any attempt to alter the Constitution.

This defence is an admirable one to prudent and cautious men; but your Lordships know that the mass of mankind are neither prudent nor cautious. Those who imagine that their situation is bad, will not readily credit that your order prevents them from being worse, and those who have nothing to loose, are not afraid of experiments. The arguments in favour of your privileges, therefore, will probably not strike others so forcibly as they do your Lordships. The reasoning may be just, but it is not enticing; it is cold, it is not calculated to inflame the passions of mankind in your defence, or to inspire them with great zeal and enthusiasm, especially when it is opposed by the more seducing doctrines of Liberty, equal rights, and a more equal distribution of property.

These new opinions are so attractive and bewitching, that they charm the imagination at once, and excite the fondest tenderness, or most transporting passion. It is for your Lordships to take heed that they are not wedded and permanently fixed in the hearts of Englishmen.

And it is proper that you should know that the factious, democratic Demagogues even venture to attack you upon your own ground. They demand, What are the mighty benefits resulting from

from the Peerage? What wise or beneficial laws have lately proceeded from their deliberations? And, in fine, what practical benefits do the people of England at present experience from your house?

I wish, my Lords, that good, and convincing answers could be given to these acrid questions. It is not enough to say that no harm results from the Peerage, as you pass almost every bill sent you by the Commons: or that you improve them by some trifling clause suggested by a law lord. Neither will it avail you to boast, that you checked the abolition of the slave trade, an act calculated to diminish the heap of human misery, and called for by the voice of humanity and by the voice of the people. Nor have you acquired much esteem by acquitting, upon your honours, a great state prisoner, as few of your Lordships took the trouble of listening either to his accusation or defence. The only way by which you can convince the lower classes of the British Nation that they derive any benefit from your house, is by occasionally bringing forward bills calculated to promote the interest and happiness of the people, or by negativing those which are evidently injurious, but which have been forced through the House of Commons by the influence of the Minister.

It will not be difficult for you to find opportunities of exercising your power in both of those ways. For, admirable as this constitution is, with a very little trouble you will easily discover a thousand plans, a thousand schemes to render the condition of the labourer and manufacturer better: and the House of Commons afford you daily opportunities of acquiring popularity, by stopping the establishment of most oppressive measures.

But you have at present, my Lords, an opportunity of doing this in an uncommonly splendid manner. An opportunity which you ought not to let slip, and you will acquire the more credit by seizing it, as nothing is expected from you.

At a moment when the accumulatiou of taxes and the calamities of an unsuccessful war have raised the necessaries of life to so high a price as to occasion universal discontent, and even to excite, in some places, dangerous tumults, a bill has passed the Commons for burdening the people with near a million of debt contracted by the Prince of Wales.

There is not a man living, possessing common sense, who can approve of this bill. There is not a man (except a maniac) whose mind is so constructed as to think it just, that the wretched pittance

tance of the industrious poor should be wrung out of their pockets, to pay for the follies and profligate expences of any one. And there is no man, except a Republican, who can think it good policy at present, to disgust the whole country with the monarchy by so shameful a waste of the public money. It is too clear why this bill is proposed by the Minister, and why it is acquiesced in by the opposition. How comes it that those who are for ever at variance, agree in this? Those who have at present the government of this country in their hands eagerly move it; and those who are candidates for that power, with equal eagerness second it. The former are anxious to secure the permanency of their power by acquiring the favor of the future sovereign; the latter, having experienced a hostile King, are desirous to suffer that hostility no longer than the present reign. A few independent and virtuous men opposed their votes to prevent this flagrant injustice. The voluntary deafness of the house prevented their voices being attended to there; but they were not lost, they were echoed from the walls, and sounded with augmenting loudness to the most remote parts of the empire.

No measure, during the present administration, has raised such general indignation. For this is no complex political question which eloquence

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can confound, or sophistry misrepresent. Every peasant knows what it is not to pay that which he spends; every peasant comprehends the character of a prodigal. Those who support themselves and their families upon one, two, or three shillings a day, can hardly help thinking that two hundred guineas a day might have satisfied even a Prince of Wales. And they are filled with resentment and horror when they learn, that *he has actually squandered between four and five hundred pounds sterling a day**.

The nature of a promise and a contract is also fully understood by the most ignorant. All know that a promise was made in 1787 to his Majesty by the Prince. And that, upon the credit given to that promise, a contract was made between the Sovereign and the Parliament. The sovereign contracted upon the faith of a promise from his son, that the ample income which was proposed should satisfy him, and that he should not exceed it. The Parliament trusting to this, agreed to pay £190,000 of debt. But this year a fresh demand for an immense sum is made. The contract is, therefore, broken. And by whom is it broken? not by the Parliament; they fulfilled their part,

* Any one who will take the trouble of reducing the Prince's annual income to daily pay, will find that this is a fair statement.

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the money was paid, but yet the contract is broken. And the Parliament are called upon by the King and the Minister to impose upon the people (against whom no crime is alledged) the burden arising from this shameful breach of contract.

Did this breach of contract proceed from mistake, from inadvertancy? Or was it done wantonly and with full knowledge? It appears that from the time his Royal Highness came of age, until the year 1787, he had contracted £190,000 of debt; that is to say, he spent exactly forty-five thousand pounds annually more than his income. This was thought enormous, but he seemed penitent. He dismissed his household, he sold his stud, he made the promise which has been mentioned to the King, and Parliament not only paid the debt, but voted an augmentation of ten thousand pounds annually to his income. What was the consequence? Did the Prince attempt to live within this income? Or did he continue to contract annually forty-five thousand pounds of debt? He did neither of these, but he has avowed having actually spent one hundred thousand pounds a year more than his augmented income.

What name can be given to such conduct? What palliation can there be? Was the household dismissed, and were the horses sold to excite compassion?

passion? And, as the promise was broken as soon as made, was it made in order to deceive? It cannot be believed that those were arts, false pretexts, in order to obtain the money. This cannot be suspected, for he who obtains money upon false pretences is thrust out of all honourable society; he is guilty of a crime cognizable at common law.

The reparations required for Carlton House was mentioned as one of the causes of the Prince's debt, and one of the motives for its extinction in 1787. It was, in short, one part of the contract, and was fulfilled, like every other part, by one of the contracting parties only, that is to say, by the Parliament. They voted the money for repairing and furnishing Carlton House in the most splendid manner; the money was paid, the money is spent, and Carlton House is not repaired. What can be said to this? The reparations of Carlton House were surely not another false pretence for obtaining money? and although the money voted for this has been squandered other ways, this could not be done by the Prince? For who can suspect one of his Majesty's sons to be guilty of swindling? Whatever appearances may be, no liberal minded man can form such a supposition. But the liberal minded and the well-born are few. The bulk of this nation are an honest, but a rude,

unlettered

unlettered people. They know not how to make proper allowances for the peculiar difficulties of the Prince's situation. The difficulty he must have in distributing presents to all his creatures with princely magnificence, while he pays his debts: and to game with spirit, and enjoy every pleasure, he happens to covet, without parsimonious frugality, and, at the same time, observe with scrupulous honor, such promises and contracts as he may find it convenient to make. The people are apt to forget that it is becoming in a Prince to lavish with a grace, and that it is their duty to pay with alacrity. It is difficult to make it palatable to them, that he should have all the merit of giving, while the gifts come out of their pockets; and they cannot be made to comprehend how this giving at another's expence can be termed generosity. They dislike all this the more because there are no instances recorded of the money being bestowed upon worthy objects, or what would appear to their dull intellects as real generosity. It has been said, indeed that a bond was given to an actress, the mistress of a singer. But this was not a gift, it was a purchase. The Prince who was at that time insolvent, only gave a piece of paper which was good for nothing, for favours of equal value. Parliament ought, certainly, not to derange the fairness of this bargain by encreasing the value of the bond, since they cannot aug-

ment that of the goods. For although the King, Lords and Commons are all-powerful in other things, in this they are impotent.

The appointment of another lady of conspicuous discretion to the bedchamber (I mean the Princess's bed chamber) is given as a proof that the Prince is capable of feeling both friendship and generosity. There can be no doubt that this appointment flowed from the purest and most disinterested friendship. The husband of the lady having accepted another office near his Royal Highness's person, shews that he who is most interested feels no jealousy, and the lady's age and faded charms must convince the most incredulous, that there can be no cause for suspicion. For what mind was ever so perverted as to prefer a respectable grandmother, to an elegant and virtuous Princess "In flower of youth and beauty's pride." This cannot be imagined. And we are convinced that the Princess approves entirely of the appointments alluded to, and that she is completely happy in the possession of so affectionate a husband, and we have no doubt that those tears which she has frequently been seen to shed, were tears of joy.

The appointment of offices is, however, not a satisfactory evidence of generosity, as they must be

be given to somebody or other. The delicate choice which the Prince, has made is a proof rather of the excellence of his understanding, than of the goodness of his heart. But as the Prince is a man of pleasure, and is known to have indulged himself to excess in every luxury, it cannot be imagined that while he surfeited himself with other pleasures, he should neglect the most delightful of all enjoyments, the performing a benevolent action.

It is much to be wished, that some instances were published of his protecting and rewarding modest merit, of his relieving poor deserving families when sinking under unavoidable misfortunes; and of neglecting his own ease and gratifications to assist the wretched. That there are no instances of this kind publicly known, can only proceed from the Prince's hatred of ostentation, and from his having laid restrictions upon the parties to conceal the hand which relieved them. This injunction, in the present circumstances, ought not to be obeyed, they ought even to risk their benefactor's displeasure, and to sound aloud his praises; which will at once dissipate the calumnies that are at present spread concerning the Prince: for there are persons base and ignorant enough

enough to assert that he never did in his life one generous and disinterested action.

The unpopularity of the Prince is deeply lamented by all lovers of the monarchy. But as this unpopularity first proceeded from the calls he made upon the public for money, it appears to me, that the Prince is less to be blamed than those who, from folly or malice, indulged him by obtaining the money.

In 1787 the Prince had contracted 190,000l. of debt; his credit was then exhausted, no one would trust him farther, and had this money never been paid there was an end of the matter. As long as the public were not called upon to pay this debt it occasioned no emotion. Few knew the amount, and nobody cared about it. It was not thought wonderful that a young Prince's affairs were ill-regulated, and he continued to possess that love and affection which the people of this country always feel for the heir apparent to the crown, until he loses it by some excessive misconduct.

Suppose for the moment, that this money had never been paid, what would have been the consequence. The Prince would have been importuned by his creditors. His furniture, perhaps his

his carriages would have been seized, which would have made it necessary for him to hire others, and those might have been as splendid as he chose. This is the sum of the mighty distress which the Prince would have been put to. For his household, his establishment, every luxury of the table, and every reasonable pleasure were to be procured by the income which remained. But he would have found it impossible to game deep or to accumulate more debt. These restraints slight as they were, would have induced him to curb his extravagance; and after a certain time probably he would have found it adviseable to make some reforms, and, in time, he might have paid off a part, if not the whole of the debt.

This would have been a practical lesson which might have had the best effect in reforming the character of him who is probably destined to reign over this empire. It might have improved his mind, and compelled him to some noble effort, when whirling in that vortex of sensuality, erroneously named pleasure, which may at length sink him into a gulph of misery and repentance.

It should be remembered, that a Prince can receive no other than practical lessons. He is surrounded with agreeable and well-bred parasites, with

with obsequious and lying valets. The few whom he sees who are not gaping with avidity for some menial place, are still anxious for his favour. It gratifies their vanity. Ambitious men of talents extol him for possessing the noblest qualities: while his companions, sycophants of a lower order, praise every pitiful taste, every mean and contemptible habit or inclination. Their congenial minds are only fitted to consider such lesser objects. While a Prince has his ears stopped with such fulsome and clogging sweets, is it possible that he should be able to listen to the sound of virtue? But those who follow vice or folly always meet at length, some check, some distress. These are pointers fixed by God to direct the wanderer to the paths of virtue. If they are removed or disregarded, he is entangled in difficulties for life.

Henry the Fifth, when Prince of Wales, struck the Chief Justice of England. Had this been submitted to, his companions would have applauded his spirit, and in the next paroxism of folly or fury he might, perhaps, have committed a murder. But the Chief Justice knew what was becoming his own dignity, and likewise, how necessary it was, for the Prince's sake, that he should be chastized, he ordered him to be seized and thrust into prison. This seasonable and practical lesson

lesson checked the Prince in the zenith of his wildness, and brought him to his senses. And when he afterwards ascended the throne, he not only subdued France and annexed it to the Crown of England, but he reigned during the whole of his life over the hearts of his subjects.

The Prince of Wales cannot by law be imprisoned for debt, but those who prevent his feeling those inconveniences which he has exposed himself to, act with malignant indulgence. Were they as anxious to be useful as to be agreeable, this would not happen. But his friends resemble not Hephestion who loved Alexander, they love the Prince. It gave him perhaps a momentary gratification, but must occasion permanent regret. To obtain it he made a rash promise which was instantly broken. It gave him at once fresh and almost unlimited credit. It enabled, it tempted him to rush into dissipation and extravagance. It ruined his constitution, and perhaps will ruin the constitution of his country.

This is no sophistry, it is obvious truth; for had the 190,000l. of debt not been paid in 1787, the 800,000l. of debt could never have been accumulated in 1795.

But that is past; it is now for your Lordships to consider what you are at present to do, and whether you are to persist in the same conduct which has had such mischievous effects.

Those must be ignorant of the human heart who imagine that remonstrances will produce any permanent change of conduct, when there is a yielding in measures. He who has acquired the habit of extravagance will never be corrected, till his credit is gone. The impression made by a remonstrance is momentary, but the inclination and passions act continually. Neither is it possible, by any regulations, to prevent a free man, in a free country, from running into debt if he chooses. You may appoint as many Comptrollers and Commissioners as you please. The only effect will be to make him pay a higher price, and so get money upon worse terms. But he will always have it in his power to contract debts in an exact proportion to his credit. If the present debt is not paid, he will, beeause he can, contract no more. And he will now receive that practical lesson which he ought to have received eight years ago. But if you pay this, or make any arrangements about it, which is in substance the same thing, consider what is likely to happen.

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Paying 190,000l. enabled the Prince to run in debt for the sum of 800,000l. Paying, adopting, or arranging this, will in the same proportion enable him to accumulate near four millions of debt. It may strike you as improbable, that he should be guilty of such inconsiderate madness; but it is not impossible. And if he does not squander so monstrous a sum, yet he may still spend enough to bring some dreadful calamity upon his country. And upon whom will the blame of that calamity attach, surely upon those who gave him the means.

And what is the argument employed by the Minister and others for liquidating this debt? It is pretended to be done to support the monarchy, as it might bring contempt and disgrace upon royalty to suffer the Prince to remain encumbered with debt. You then instruct him that it is necessary, for the sake of the Constitution, to pay his debts. And as a great debt will bring more disgrace than a small one, the greater the debt is, it is the more necessary to discharge it. This is teaching the Prince, with a vengeance, not to restrain himself in future, and such a reason being given, will enable him to get ample credit. You see what monstrous consequences flow from such reasons. But, my Lords, it is the folly of contracting the debt that disgraces. It is the

ungenerous conduct towards a generous people that excites contempt. Paying the debt can never lessen, but augments this degradation, and by so striking a contrast of conduct redoubles the odium in which the Prince is held, excites in the nation disgust at monarchy, and may shake the throne.

And, my Lords, you must perceive that your rank and privileges cannot survive the Monarchy. It is evident indeed that they stand upon a much weaker foundation. Kingly power might be preserved without yours, but yours cannot exist without a King; your condition is undoubtedly the most precarious of the two, and at present you ought to look to yourselves.

There has taken place of late a most dangerous schism between the higher and lower ranks of men, both in this country and in the rest of Europe. This schism you should do every thing in your power to close, it cannot be advantageous to you. For there can be none of your Lordships so sanguine as to think it possible, that you can increase your privileges in the present disposition of men's minds. All that you can expect is to retain your present advantages. And how is this to be done? not by widening the breach which exists between you and the people, not by enmity, or hostilities; you must be well aware that

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you cannot succeed by force. Destruction must follow contention, and if you fall, your doom is irrevocable.

The only means by which you can retain your high and envied situation is, by composing all differences with the lower orders. It is by shewing, that your exalted rank gives you too much pride to act servilely, and that your large possessions place you above corruption. It is in fine by acquiring (or if you please by retaining) the esteem and love of your countrymen.

You can hardly be ignorant how unfavourable an impression has taken place with regard to you. By some you are considered as cyphers, and by others as worse, for they pretend that the little effort you do make, is always to the prejudice of the lower orders.

These opinions are propagated with zeal, they spread daily, and should they become universal, you are undone. There is no other way of wiping off this dangerous impression, but by making active exertions for the good of the people, and disregarding party and ministers. Seize the present golden opportunity, give a decided, a manly vote, against this opprobrious bill for adopting the Prince's debts; you will by this one act acquire

the admiration, and secure the gratitude of the people of England.

And what, my Lords, do you risk? The displeasure of the Sovereign and his son will be of short duration. They will soon be reconciled; for they both know that you are the firmest supporters of the throne, as your interest is inseparably linked with theirs. They will even thank you, in a short time, for what you have done, because the popularity you will by that means acquire will enable you to protect them more effectually.

Whatever resentment the Minister may feel, which some of your Lordships may dread more than the King's, be assured that he will entirely suppress it. He will never venture to express hatred at your house. He knows that not only his fortune, but even his life may depend upon being well with you.

I now shall terminate by intreating the ancient nobility, if they have any wish to transmit those honours and that power, which they possess, to their descendants, that they will act with the dignity of their ancestors, and shew that they have not degenerated.

I intreat

I intreat the law Lords to recollect the sacred nature of property, and the injustice of loading frugal men, with the debts of a spendthrift; of punishing millions for the faults of one. Let them remember, how often they have committed debtors to loathsome prisons, even when their ruin proceeded from fire or from shipwreck, or some other unavoidable calamity, and when the debts were contracted for the necessaries of life. And I beseech the spiritual Lords, that they will not forget those lessons which they have often taught in holy places. That they will reflect how unbecoming it would be for religious pastors to extort uncharitably any thing from the laborious poor, in order to administer to the vices of a young man, by voting him the means of indulging in dissipation and profligacy. And I recommend it lastly to all of your Lordships, if you love the Prince, if you love your Sovereign, if you love your country, if you love yourselves, that you will boldly negative this absurd, this infamous, this dangerous proposal.

FINIS.